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SUBJECT: DRC PRIME MINISTER GIZENGA RESIGNS

REF: 07 Kinshasa 1307

¶1. (U) Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga delivered his resignation letter to President Joseph Kabila today, September 25. In a subsequent address on national television, Gizenga cited health reasons as the driving force behind his resignation, which Kabila has yet to formally accept. Although it was widely rumored that Kabila wanted to replace Gizenga, it is not unlikely that the reason for his departure is, in fact, ill health.

¶2. (U) Gizenga, 83, is Chairman of PALU ("PARTI LUMBUMBISTE UNIFIE" in French), which he helped found in 1965. Gizenga served as Deputy Prime Minister under Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba during the first independent Congo government in 1960, then fled into exile after President Mobutu seized power in 1965. He returned to Zaire in 1991 after Mobutu pledged political space for opposition parties, remaining active as a member of the opposition and leader of PALU.

¶3. (U) Kabila tapped Gizenga as Prime Minister in December 2006 in accordance with the power sharing agreement between PALU and the majority coalition, the AMP ("ALLIANCE POUR LA MAJORITE PRESIDENTIELLE"). The AMP also includes Kabila's party, the PPRD ("PARTI DU PEUPLE POUR LA RECONSTRUCTION ET LA DEMOCRATIE") and former Mobutu followers, the UDEMO ("UNION DES DEMOCRATES MOBUTUISTES"). The National Assembly approved Gizenga as Prime Minister in February 2007.

¶4. (SBU) Gizenga's tenure as PM was relatively uneventful, although notable for its lack of energy and initiative in setting policy. Since early 2008, the opposition has called for Gizenga's resignation, citing his advanced age and the inability of his government to implement programs. Real power lay with the ministries, and, ultimately, with the Presidency. Gizenga did reduce the number of government ministries from 40 to 33 in a November 2007 cabinet reshuffle (reftel). A hallmark of Gizenga's tenure has been a lack of coordination between ministries. A recent agreement with China for billions of dollars in mining concessions was not coordinated, with separate, opaque accords signed between the Chinese and only some of the concerned ministries. Other interested ministries were not involved. As a result, there is confusion as to whether the monies lent the DRC are concessionary and thus impact on the country's external debt.

Who's next?

¶5. (SBU) Gizenga's resignation is hardly a surprise. Attention is now focused on who Kabila will select to replace him and whether a new GDRC will result in a more active government program. In considering a new PM, Kabila must balance the weight of PALU in the coalition and the important east-west dynamic within the government. With declining support in the east, he may consider a PALU candidate from the West to shore up support from the PALU party base in Bandundu province.

¶6. (SBU) Two oft-mentioned candidates to succeed Gizenga include PALU second-in-command and Minister for Urban Affairs Sylvain Ngabu, and Gizenga advisor Godefroid Mayobo. Ngabu is from Ituri in the east and thus could create a problem with regional balancing; Mayobo is from a rival tribe of Gizenga's in Bandundu; it is unclear how enthusiastically Gizenga would support Mayobo. A third candidate who may get the nod is Budget Minister Adolphe Muzitu, a competent technocrat and PALU member from Bandundu. In the end, however, Kabila may choose someone from within his own party (PPRD) ranks.

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